

## RECENT INFRASTRUCTURE ADVANCEMENTS BOOST SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

My highest priority in representing the Ninth Congressional District in Congress is the creation of new jobs for our region. For that reason, I work actively with Southwest Virginia's local government and business leaders to implement a multi-faceted strategy to enhance economic development in the many sectors of Southwest Virginia's economy. Our strategy includes ensuring that the region's infrastructure is sufficient to meet the needs of our region's locally owned businesses as well as companies seeking new locations to expand their operations. In recent years, we have taken great strides in developing the region's telecommunications network, providing adequate water and wastewater systems and improving the region's transportation assets, all of which make our region more attractive to the technology based employers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I am particularly pleased to note that last week, we took three great steps forward in advancing these goals, and many similar steps are underway in other parts of the Ninth District. First, at my request, on July 2, the U.S. Department of

Commerce granted \$22.7 million from its Recovery Act broadband grant program for a major expansion of the broadband network in an eight county area of our region. The federal funds will enable the construction of a middle-mile fiber optic network 388 miles in length that will bring broadband service near 120 educational institutions, health clinics and other community facilities and within 2 miles of more than 18,000 homes and more than 500 businesses.

With the middle-mile fiber optic network in place, it will be possible to provide last-mile connections to bring high-speed Internet access services to thousands of homes and businesses that do not have broadband today. It is also projected that 295 direct jobs will be created in the construction of the network. A far larger number of jobs will be created in future years as technology-based companies that will utilize the broadband facilities locate in our region.

Second, I was pleased to participate on July 7 in the groundbreaking for a major runway restoration project at the New River Valley Airport near Dublin. At 6,200 feet in length the airport has the longest general aviation airport runway in the western part of Virginia. With a width of 150 feet, it is also the widest runway in the region. With this exceptional runway this airport can be a larger contributor to economic growth in the New River Valley, but to achieve that potential, a major

reconstruction of the runway is needed. At the present time, the airport ships or receives more than 180,000 pounds of cargo each year. That commercial activity has caused wear and tear on the runway which has numerous cracks and areas where grass is growing through the damaged pavement.

The last time that the airport runway was repaved was 20 years ago, and that was only a partial resurfacing. For the past several years I have been working closely with airport officials and with the local governments in the New River Valley to obtain federal funding for a major runway reconstruction with the goal of enabling the airport to achieve its true potential as a contributor to the regional economy. Today, the funding for the project in the amount of \$5 million is all in hand, \$4.7 million of which has been provided by the federal government at my urging. With this funding, the entire length and width of the runway will be resurfaced, portions of the runway will be leveled and regraded, new lighting will be installed on the field, and one of the turnoffs will be redesigned to accommodate a future taxiway extension. With these changes, the runway will be able to handle heavier cargo planes and all corporate aircraft. It will truly achieve its potential to be a major driver of economic growth in our region.

Finally, I also joined with Washington County officials on July 9 in breaking ground on two new major, federally financed

water improvement projects that are expected to meet the County's water needs for the next 40 years. Business and residential growth in the County is causing the demand for public water services to outpace the County's water treatment plant capacity. To address this problem, I worked with Washington County officials to secure two low-interest federal loans totaling \$31 million for a major expansion of the County's water treatment plant and for the construction of a new water storage tank.

With the benefit of the federal funds, the County will nearly triple the size of its water treatment plant from 4.6 million gallons per day to 12 million gallons per day, and a 4 million gallon water storage tank will be constructed to serve as the plant's receiving tank and the County's primary water storage facility. When construction is completed, new public water services can be provided to as many as 1,300 homes in Washington County, and the public water infrastructure will accommodate future commercial and industrial growth.

These three projects represent significant steps forward in our efforts to ensure that our region's infrastructure helps us achieve our economic development goals, and I look forward to marking similar successes in other parts of the Ninth District in the near future.

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